The Art of Verbal Self Defence

DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE

by Mike Moore
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COPING WITH TOXIC PEOPLE

In my travels across North America speaking on motivation and human potential I hear the same question asked repeatedly, “What can I do to become more assertive?” There is no doubt about it, there are people in our lives who are harmful to our health and we don’t like it one bit.

I read recently that toxic people make up about ten percent of the population and cause over 50% of all relational damage. For our own well-being and the well-being of those we care about we must learn how to cope with these toxic people at home, at work and at play.

I wrote the following book in response to the question, “How can I learn to cope with the difficult people in my life?” From the reaction I have received to this book it is proving helpful. I do want to say emphatically that what you read here won’t do a thing to improve your situation unless you have the courage to use the suggestions given. Go for it! You’re worth the effort.
TOXIC PEOPLE

✓ rob us of our dignity.
✓ destroy our self confidence.
✓ increase our stress levels.
✓ destroy our morale.
✓ erode our self esteem.
✓ foster negativity.
✓ decrease productivity.
✓ make life hellish.
✓ are abusive.

Toxic people are toxic because they can get away with it and it works for them.
THREE TYPES OF BEHAVIOUR

PASSIVE:
example:
"If it isn’t too much trouble would you mind cleaning the bathroom? If you can’t do it, that’s OK. I hope you don’t mind my asking."

AGGRESSIVE:
example:
"Come on. Get up off your rump and clean the damn bathroom. I’m not your slave around here."

ASSERTIVE:
example:
"I noticed that we are neglecting to clean the bathroom so I prepared a cleaning schedule. I’m on for next Saturday and you can be on for the following week."

Where are you on the above list?
I believe that people are toxic and difficult for one or more of the following reasons:

1. They are seeking attention. We all hunger to be noticed and when we aren’t noticed for the good we do we will be noticed for the hell we can raise.

2. They want power. When someone feels powerless in certain areas of their life it is reasonable to assume that they will seek power over people wherever they can.

3. They seek revenge for something done to them by someone or the system.

4. They feel inadequate. We do tend to put others down in an attempt to build ourselves up.

It is important to understand why some are toxic and difficult in order to be able to cope with them effectively.
HOW TO DEAL WITH TOXIC PEOPLE

Remember that you can’t change toxic people, but you can learn to cope with them and neutralize their impact on your life. Here are some effective strategies to try.

✔ Always stand at eye level with the person you are confronting. Never have them standing over you, looking down.

✔ Respect the toxic person and always expect respect in return. Settle for nothing less.

✔ Remain calm.

✔ Listen attentively.

✔ Don’t argue or interrupt, just listen.

✔ Don’t accuse or judge, just state how you feel.

✔ If the toxic person tries to verbally bully you, just say, “I don’t allow people to treat me this way.” Then slowly and calmly walk away.

✔ When someone is being toxic to you here is a powerful response and one that is easy to use because you don’t have to say a word. In the midst of a toxic attack just... pause... look at the person without emotion... turn and walk away. It works!
Anger is sometimes a valid response.

If all else fails you might be left with only one option; to separate yourself from the toxic person in your life.

I will be commenting more on these later.

You don’t exist to be someone's personal garbage dump.
TYPES OF DIFFICULT PEOPLE

People continue to be difficult because it is an effective strategy for them.

**THE BULLY:**
This kind of toxic personality is openly hostile and aggressive. They come at you with guns blazing in a relentless attack to prove that they are right and you are wrong. They overwhelm their opponents and attempt to drive them into silent submission.

**How to cope:** *Stand up to them. Don’t look or sound weak. Look them in the eye and deal with them in a friendly but firm manner. When their strategy doesn’t work they begin to soften and change their tone.*

**THE AMBUSHER:**
She/ he shoots verbal bullets at you from the safety of a humourous cover. They will try to make you look like a fool in front of others by making a smart funny remark. Our silence and passive response provides a secure cover for the ambusher. It also gives him/her encouragement to continue.
How to Cope: When you are the victim of a ambusher the best strategy is this, say calmly but firmly, ”Is that remark a dig, John?” This response destroys their cover and they have to come out in the open. They are now on the defensive. An ambusher’s favourite response is, “You’re too sensitive.” or “Can’t you take a joke?” You simply say that you can take a joke, but you interpreted his remark as a dig. Then ask him/her point blank, “Did you mean it that way?”

NEVER LAUGH WITH OR IGNORE AN AMBUSHER.

THE EXPLODER:
Erupts without warning in a giant explosion. They are out of control. Everyone becomes silent due to shock and total surprise. It is one huge adult temper tantrum.

How to cope: Say nothing. Look the volcano in the eye and remain calm. Let her/him run out of steam and then say, “I really want to hear what you have to say, but not this way.”

THE WHINER:
They have a distinct whining sound to them. They are condemnatory and accusatory in their responses. Their job, as they see it, is to point out flaws and shortcomings; your job is to fix things. Chances are that they won’t like the way you fix things either.

How to cope: Listen actively but don’t agree or disagree. Ask them how they want the issue to turn out? Can you put your thoughts and feelings in writing for me?
THE NEGATIVIST:
Wet blanket responses: It’s no use, it won’t work. We did it that way before and it was a flop. That’s a total waste of time.

How to cope: Always respond with a positive statement. Never argue with a negativist. Don’t let yourself be dragged into their mentality. “Sure we have problems, but...” Then offer a positive suggestion.

THE CLAM:
Clams are non-responsive. They say nothing. If you are lucky you might get a grunt. They leave people puzzled and confused.

How to cope: Put them at ease. You start the conversation and then ask for their reaction. Don’t be the first to break the silence. Let it hang there for awhile. If nothing happens schedule another time to talk and try again. Ask specific questions and WAIT for answers.

KNOW IT ALLS:
They feel that they have superior knowledge and insights. They are thorough, well planned, well prepared, arrogant and abrasive.

How to cope: Do your homework. Be as well prepared and as thorough as they are. Make sure you understand their position by listening carefully. Ask for clarification if it is required. Stay calm and try not to be intimidated. Another type of know-it-all is the “hot air know-it-all”,
but they usually don’t know what they’re talking about. Coping with this type of difficult person requires taking them aside one on one and pointing out where you disagree. Try to let them save face by saying something like, “Perhaps you were thinking of _______________”.

THE PLEASERS:
Pleasers always want to agree with you. They will agree with everything you say and suggest, but will never get things done. They want to be liked at all costs. Their fear of disappointing you results in them never doing anything that might disappoint you. This usually means that they end up doing very little. This leaves you frustrated.

How to cope: Pleasers need direction, supervision and appreciation. A definite plan of action will hopefully result in the successful completion of tasks.
BECOMING ASSERTIVE

1. Don't avoid expressing your negative or critical feelings. They are not bad or improper, they are just your feelings and you are entitled to them.

2. Feelings aren't facts. They are just feelings.

3. Use “I” Language to indicate that the feelings you are expressing are yours. You are not accusing or judging anyone.

4. You don’t have to justify your feelings, you only need to state them.

5. Assertive behaviour discloses your wants, needs, preferences and opinions. Aggressive behaviour discounts, ignores and over-rides the wants, needs, preferences and opinions of others.

6. Assertive behaviour supports your own dignity, while aggressive behaviour demeans the dignity of others.

7. Toxic people usually put others down when relating to them, with a look of disdain, a sarcastic remark or direct verbal bullying.

8. You must have the courage to be assertive.

WE RECEIVE THE KIND OF TREATMENT WE TOLERATE
DO YOU HAVE A PROBLEM SAYING “NO”?  

Why is it so hard for us to say “no” when someone asks us to do something we don't want to do? If you're like me, you look for every possible excuse to get out of it and when you find one suitable to the situation you hope that you can make it sound convincing.

Could our difficulty saying no come from our desire to be liked and approved? I think so. I personally think that, in our desire to please, we try to accommodate the requests of others even when we don't want to. After we have agreed to do what we don't want to do or go where we don't want to go we get angry with ourselves for not being able to stand up and say “NO”.

Have you ever been in the company of someone telling a racist, sexist or filthy joke which you find disgusting? How many times have you found yourself laughing when you wanted to look at the person and say, “I found that offensive” Once again we have failed to express our true feelings because we didn’t want to alienate or hurt somebody’s feelings or risk their disapproval.

The fact is that we don't need to give anyone an excuse for not wanting to do what they want us to do or go where they want us to go. We shouldn't feel guilty telling someone that the joke they told was offensive. But we do.
HOW TO MAKE SAYING “NO” EASIER

Saying “NO” requires practise. It doesn’t come easily to any of us, so let me share with you some of the tactics I have employed in my struggle to be assertive and say “No”.

✓ Tell yourself frequently that you don’t owe anyone an explanation why you can’t do what they want you to do. You might owe them a response, but not an explanation. How often has a person asked you to go somewhere and you come up with something like, “I can’t tonight because my sister and her children are flying in from Vancouver and I have to pick them up at the airport?” Later on that evening you see the same person at the corner store and you feel as if you have been caught with your hand in the cookie jar. You just hope that they don’t ask you about your sister, her kids or the airport.

✓ When placed in the position where you are being asked to do something you don’t want to do, just say, “Thanks, but I would rather not tonight.” Leave it at that. No explanation!

✓ Remember, you don’t have to please everyone. You select the people you want to please and how often you will please them.

✓ If you have a good friend with whom you feel comfortable, practise situations where you refuse the request of the other. It’s good to hear yourself saying “NO” out loud.

✓ Remind yourself that you wouldn’t worry about what people thought of you if you only knew how seldom they did.
✓ Try these responses:

“I just can’t tomorrow night, Thanks anyway.” **That’s it, no more!**

“I really don’t feel like it tonight, can we make it another time?”

“Thanks anyway, but I just feel that I need a quiet evening at home.”

“Thanks for the invitation. Perhaps another time?”

“If asked by a co-worker to cover for them or take their shift, just say, “I’m sorry I can’t.” Don’t explain why you can’t. It’s none of their business. You don’t owe them an explanation.

“I just don’t want to.” Good luck with this one.

“I think I’ll pass tonight, thanks.”

When you finally do assert yourself in one of these situations you will feel fantastic and you’ll be more willing and able to assert yourself again in the future.
It’s quite obvious to anyone who follows the news that we are living in an age of rage. We not only read about road rage, air rage and work rage but frequently we are involved in one of them ourselves, if not as participants, then as observers. Who hasn’t been furious after being cut off on the highway by an inconsiderate, aggressive driver? Who hasn’t felt like belting someone at the office for their lack of consideration or insensitivity from time to time? I was reading recently that 10% percent of office workers surveyed have felt like doing physical damage to their bosses. Feeling like doing it is one thing; actually doing it is another.

In my opinion much of the violence we observe in society begins with intense frustration followed by anger, followed by violence. If we are to avoid violence we must learn how to handle our own frustration and neutralize the frustration of others.
CULTIVATING THE ART OF PATIENCE

This is something I have struggled with for a long time. Those around me say I am improving and I really think I am, but not without a lot of hard work. Here are a few suggestions for you to try.

✓ Learn to relax. (I have included a list of relaxation techniques to use. Use them whenever you find yourself getting tense and frustrated.)

✓ Find something funny in the situation and laugh heartily when you find it. Remember, if you don’t laugh at yourself, you leave the job to someone else.

✓ Ask yourself how your frustration will do anything to change the circumstances you’re in.

✓ Can you do anything to alter the situation? If the answer is “No” then relax and ride it out as calmly as you can.

✓ Is it worth risking a stroke or high blood pressure?

✓ Remind yourself that you are only in control of your actions and attitudes. You have no control over those of others.

✓ In the over-all scheme of things is this really that important?

Remember that sometimes you are the difficult person you have to cope with.

Fretting and fuming are a lot like a rocking chair; they’ll give you something to do but they won’t get you anywhere.
If there is one thing that annoys me more than anything else it’s having a clerk in a store stop serving me to answer the telephone and serve someone who is miles away. For years I would fume and fret inside, but say nothing. Not anymore! Now, before I begin any transaction with a clerk I tell them up front, in a pleasant tone, to put any incoming calls on hold while they are waiting on me. If they ask why I tell them that I believe that a paying, present customer should be more important than one calling in. When you do this before the transaction begins you avoid the frustration involved in being left standing there while someone answers the phone.

SELECTIVE SILENCE

One of the most effective ways of dealing with difficult people involves what I call selective silence. It is easy to use, and very low threat.

Whenever I speak on the topic of assertiveness someone always raises the issue of courage. “I like what you have to say. Mike, but I really don’t think I’d have the courage to put your suggestions into practise.” If you feel this way then selective silence is for you.

People are correct in thinking that being assertive requires a certain degree of courage, but the rewards of mustering this courage are worth the effort and I think you’re worth the effort.

To those of you who feel a lack of courage, here are the basics of selective silence for you to try. To be really effective they should be used in combination with verbal strategies, but they will work on their own.
When people are being difficult, they are, as I said earlier, often seeking attention and power. When you respond verbally to their toxic attack you are still giving them attention while you deny them power over you. When you use selective silence you deny them both attention and power. You are basically ignoring them and no one likes to be ignored.

TRY THIS...

✓ When someone is being toxic and you want to let them know you have had enough and won’t take this treatment any longer, just remain silent and look away. The act of looking away alone communicates volumes to the toxic person. It says clearly and emphatically “I’m shutting you out, dismissing you.” When you add a look of “Are you for real” and then look away you increase the strength of the message. To add further emphasis, combine walking away to the equation. This will totally disarm the toxic menace and you didn’t have to say a word.

✓ Difficult people thrive on seeing you upset. Somehow it makes them feel powerful by making you feel angry. Silence denies them the satisfaction they seek. Say nothing and maintain a blank stare.

✓ A silent smile... When a person is being difficult just look at them, smile and look away. By smiling you add another dimension to your assertiveness. In effect you turn the tables on the difficult one. Nobody likes to be laughed at and a puzzled smile makes the other wonder what’s so amusing and if you’re taking them seriously or not. Of course you’re not taking them seriously and by not doing so you continue denying them power and attention. And you still haven’t said a word.

SILENCE IS A POWERFUL TOOL IN YOUR ASSERTIVE TOOLBOX.
THE POWER OF A WELL POSED QUESTION

When you ask someone a question you put them on the defensive. Difficult people prefer to be on the offensive. To put them on the defensive and take the pressure off yourself, ask questions. “Why” questions are the most threatening of all. When you ask “why” you place the burden of accountability on the one questioned. They must explain themselves and justify their opinions, remarks and ideas and in so doing they lose power over you.

ASSERT YOURSELF BY ASKING QUESTIONS.

Here are a few suggestions.

"Why do you insist on being difficult with me?"

"Why do you feel this way?"

"What makes you say that?"

"Are you upset?"
(Toxic people hate to have people think that they are angry or upset at anything. They must be in control at all times.)

"Did I do something to make you angry?"

"Do you enjoy hurting my feelings?"
The list is endless. Think up your own questions. Ask them in a very calm tone of voice then pause and wait for their answer. Don’t speak until they do. If they refuse to answer employ one of the selective silence strategies.

When a difficult person is challenged they tend to back off or become more aggressive. No matter what their response, stay calm and silent. If they become verbally aggressive remain calm and silent and then quietly add, “I see that I have upset you.” Then walk away.

THE POWER OF APPRECIATION AND PRAISE

I don’t think we should overlook the role of appreciation and praise in dealing with the toxic people in our lives. If what I wrote about toxic people feeling inadequate is true then perhaps making them feel more adequate will neutralize their toxicity. It is certainly worth a try.

William James, once wrote that we all have an intense desire to be appreciated. When someone appreciates who we are and affirms our value it’s difficult to be toxic with that person. People are reluctant to bite the hand that strokes them. While I’m sure there are exceptions to the rule, I am convinced that it rings true in many instances. I know that I personally would hesitate to make life difficult for someone who thought the world of me.

So if you live or work with someone toxic try praising them in their non-toxic moments and applying silence and avoidance when they are toxic. They might soon associate non-toxicity with praise and affirmation and toxicity with rejection and isolation. No one wants to be rejected.

While I believe that this can be effective we must realize that there are some difficult people who are just too wounded to respond positively to
this strategy. It is worth trying nevertheless. If it works you have solved
your problem and made a friend.

⚠️ IT’S DIFFICULT TO RESIST THE POWER OF
APPROCIATION AND PRAISE.
THE DESTRUCTIVE IMPACT OF SARCASM, RIDICULE AND PUTDOWN

NEVER, NEVER, NEVER tolerate sarcasm, ridicule or put-down in your relationships. Never use them on others and never let them be used on you. They erode your confidence, self-esteem and self worth. When these are low you become easy prey for toxic people. You MUST always challenge those who choose to use these destructive forms of communication on you. All you have to say is, “I took that remark as a put-down. Was it?” Once again you put the perpetrator on the defensive and s/he has to explain the intention behind the remark. Most people will backtrack when challenged. Who wants to come out and say, “Yes, I meant to put you down.”

QUESTIONS TO ASK

"Are you ridiculing me?"

"Do I detect sarcasm in your remark?"

Questions like these put the onus on the toxic person to explain.

WHATEVER YOU DO, NEVER LET SARCASM, RIDICULE AND PUT DOWN GO UNCHALLENGED.
Everyone is equal in dignity.

Your dignity is worth defending.

I was reading recently that 80 percent of the population have low self esteem. For the remaining 20 percent their self esteem is in need of a boost.
DEVELOPING STRENGTH AND CONFIDENCE

In my manual on public speaking I wrote about the “act as if” principle. Essentially it is the belief that if you act the way you want to become, you become the way you act. So if you want to become confident start acting confidently.

Toxic people are less likely to prey upon someone strong and confident. They are usually drawn to those they perceive to be gentle and weak. It is a sad commentary on our human condition when gentility is perceived as weakness by some, but that seems to be the way it is.

To avoid being the victim of a toxic attack begin to act strong and confident. Try this... The next time you enter a bank or a store to do business do so with an obvious confident manner or style. Hold your head high, smile broadly, walk briskly, look people in the eye and conduct your business in a strong, confident voice. Avoid being loud and aggressive. Be strong and friendly. Are you treated any differently?

This might be difficult to do at first but it will become easier and the treatment you receive will be much more positive and hospitable. Give it a try. Again, remember, you’re worth the effort it takes to assert this image.

Some people have said to me that they just couldn’t do this type of thing. It just isn’t them. If this applies to you then my advice to you is to do it to the degree you think you can. If a confident smile and a brisk pace is
all you can muster then do that. It is a start. Try to push yourself in this though. Try to go beyond your comfort zone. In my opinion the greatest enemy of human potential is the comfort zone. Great things happen when we make friends with our discomfort zone. Become friendly with your discomfort zone.

When I was younger I was somewhat passive. People were able to dominate and manipulate me to a point. When I became angry they would stop. Using the above technique has really helped me become more assertive. It works. Try it.

THE MORE CONFIDENT YOU BECOME THE EASIER IT IS TO BE ASSERTIVE
ASKING FOR WHAT YOU WANT

If you’re like me you hesitate to bother anyone or inconvenience them. I recall years ago being in the movie theatre and needing to go to the washroom. I sat there in total discomfort not wanting to disturb the people in the same row by having to let me out. The whole thing was ridiculous. I needed to go to the washroom and all I had to do was stand and say, “Excuse me please.” I’m not like this any more, thank God. I no longer have a problem asking for what I want.

Here is a list of non-assertive statements:

"If it’s O.K. with you...."

"If you don’t mind..."

"I hate to put you out, but..."

"If it doesn’t put you out too much could I..."

"I hate to be such a bother..."

"If it doesn’t inconvenience you too much..."

"Are you sure it isn’t too much trouble?"
"Would it be alright if I use your washroom?" (Who’s going to mind?) Can you actually see someone saying “Yes I do mind “?

All of the above are non-assertive and overly polite. They project an image of insecurity. Avoid them.

What to say instead...

Just know what it is you want and then ask for it politely.

Example:

"Could you please tell me where I can find the information booth?"

"I would like to visit the museum with you."

"Could I use the car tonight, please? "

"Where is your washroom, please? "

JUST KNOW WHAT YOU WANT AND THEN ASK POLITELY.
Never underestimate the power of a stern, disapproving look. It certainly saves you words and allows you to assert yourself with minimum risk. If someone is doing or saying something that puts you down or tries to take advantage of you, give them a look of disapproval which says loudly and clearly, “BACK OFF”.

There are degrees to the look of disapproval. It can be a quick look or a more prolonged one. Just make it suit the circumstance. If, in response to your look, someone says, “Are you angry?” Just give a curt, “Yes” or “I am annoyed.” DON’T apologize for the way you feel. Most of the time people won’t ask if you’re angry. They’ll know. Remember that 80% of communication is done with body language.
Often we are asked to make a decision. It might require thought and study or it might be something you can decide right away. If it is one that demands more thought let the person asking for a decision know that you need time to study the issue and that you will have a decision within 24 hours. DON’T SAY, “If that’s O.K. with you?” If it is something you can decide on quickly, do it. Make your decision.

Don’t say...

"It doesn’t matter to me."

"Whatever you decide is fine with me."

"I’m easy..."

"You decide..."

These responses make you appear weak and indecisive.

THE VALUE OF AN ASSERTIVE TONE OF VOICE.

Your message is always enhanced by your tone of voice. Non-assertive people usually speak in a weak, rather passive tone while assertive people speak with greater strength. Don’t confuse strength with volume. Volume irritates and suggests to me that the speaker is trying to impress or be the centre of attention. Tone can be pleasant or unpleas-
ant, soft or harsh. Whatever tone you choose it will enhance the message you want to impart.

THE ASSERTIVE, CONFIDENT LOOK

Don’t look away, look around. Non-assertive people tend to look down, up, or away when in a room filled with strangers. It’s as if they don’t want others to notice them and they won’t be noticed if they look up, down, or away. Assertive people, on the other hand, enter a room and look around as if they had just entered a family gathering and everyone is happy to see them.

People form perceptions of you based on the vibrations you emit on entering a room. If you enter with a confident smile and a welcoming, inviting gaze people will perceive you as a strong, confident, socially charming personality. They will relate to you out of their perceptions of you.

Make sure that the vibrations you give off in any social situation say to others, “I belong here as much as anyone else, and when you get to know me you’re going to like me.” Remember all human beings are equal in dignity. No one is better than anyone else.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU MEET RESISTANCE

Let’s say, for example, that you have asserted yourself in a socially difficult situation by asking an obnoxious person to get off your case. They pay no attention to your request and continue the irritating behaviour. What do you do?

Well one thing is certain, you don’t want the situation to become violent or abusive. This kind of behaviour solves nothing and can result in animosity and alienation. Once you have asserted yourself and you get a negative response, let it go.
Don't cross the line and become aggressive. Distance yourself from the irritation both physically and emotionally if possible. If you can't get away physically then tune him/her out and ignore them. Think of something positive and try to forget the whole situation. DON'T let it eat away at you. You have done what you had to do. You have no control over the behaviour of others. You only control what you think and do, so chalk it up to ignorance and get on with your life.

Here’s how I handled a toxic situation that occurred on a flight from Yellowknife in Canada’s North West Territories recently.

I was on board the plane looking for my seat which was in aisle 19, seat A (a window seat). When I found the row there were two businessmen already seated in the aisle and middle seat. As I went to enter the row to take my seat I noticed that they had briefcases and carry-on luggage placed on the aisle floor making it difficult for me to take my seat. All such luggage is to be stowed under the seat in front of you. They made no effort to move the luggage to allow me to get to my seat. As I crawled over the stuff on the floor I said in a rather irritated voice, “It would be nice if you moved this luggage and put it under the seat.” They did so reluctantly and I was able to sit down. I knew that in saying what I just said they would ignore me the entire trip and I was right. They did. In mid-flight I had to go to the bathroom. Should I ask these two people to move or should I sit there in discomfort? There was no decision to be made really. Of course I would ask them to move. In a very strong, confident voice I said, “Excuse me gentlemen I am going to have to ask you to let me out.” They did so quietly, not without some facial irritation at being inconvenienced. Did it bother me? NOT IN THE LEAST. On my way back to my seat I had to ask them to move again. This time I just smiled and said, “Thanks.” You know, I felt good that I got my feelings off my chest and put the irritation on their shoulders where it belonged.
Have you ever experienced a conversational bully? A person, who through sheer volume and emotion, can give you the impression that they’re the final authority on any issue so you shouldn’t even want to have an opinion other than theirs.

Everyone deserves to have his/her opinion heard and respected, if not agreed with. No one person has a monopoly on wisdom and correct insight. Truth is cumulative. This means that your opinion or insight when added to mine and those of others reveals more of the truth of any situation under consideration. My truth plus your truth brings us closer to the truth.

When you do meet a conversational bully, who tries to make you feel that any contribution you might make to the discussion is worthless, try some of these:

“I try to respect your opinions. Please try to respect mine.”

“Does it always upset you when people express an opinion that differs from yours?”

“Does my opinion really upset you that much?”

“It’s just an opinion. It’s not worth having a stroke over.”
“Try to calm down and listen to what I have to say.”

“I don’t have the time, the need, or the interest in getting into an argument with you. I will just say how I feel and leave it at that.”

Conversational bullies can destroy your confidence, erode your already fragile self esteem and make you feel that you have nothing of value to contribute. DON’T LET THEM!!
Humour, while being invaluable to human health and well-being, can also be destructive if used improperly. Laughing at someone is never justified. Laughing with someone is to be encouraged. If you feel that you are being laughed at by others you must assert yourself in your own defence. Ask this question calmly, but firmly: “Are you laughing at me or with me?” Notice you’re giving them an option. They will always say, “Oh, I’m laughing with you”, even when they’re not. No one wants to say otherwise. When they say this you come back with, “That’s good because laughing at someone is rude and ignorant.” If they don’t get your message after this remark then they are dense.

If you don’t want to give them an option just look at them sternly and ask, “Why are you laughing at me?” This will put the one who's laughing in a position where they must explain their rude behaviour to the one being laughed at.

WHAT IF THE PERSON BECOMES OFFENDED BY MY ASSERTIVENESS?

You have no control over someone’s response to you. If they choose to distance themselves from you because you spoke your mind then that is their choice. You will just have to live with it. Besides, their friendship isn’t genuine if it doesn’t allow for the expression of opposing opinion or individual assertiveness.
COPING WITH A TOXIC BOSS/SUPERVISOR/MANAGER

As a member of the workforce, have you ever wondered how so many non-people persons can be promoted to positions of authority over others? In my opinion supervisory positions should be filled by those who have an obvious love for people and are well trained in the art of motivation and caring leadership. Such is not the case in too many instances.

From my experience some of the most socially inept, easily threatened and insecure people are promoted to leadership positions based on who you know in the company and how long you’ve worked there. This happens far too often with a disastrous impact on staff morale. To add to the tragedy these leaders are frequently totally unaware of how lacking they are in people skills. They often consider themselves to be effective supervisors who run a “tight ship”. Terms like “my people”, “my department” and “I have 25 people under me” are part of their daily vocabulary. In my opinion this type of language indicates autocratic, unenlightened leadership.

HOW TO ASSERT YOURSELF IN THIS SITUATION

When you find yourself working for one of these leaders how can you assert yourself? It is difficult, but not impossible.

Talk in terms of stated goals and objectives. Usually, every office or workplace today has a mission statement framed and hanging on the wall for the world to see just how enlightened it is. It contains a number of wonderful ideas about empowerment, mutual respect, co-operation,
and affirmation. In many instances the mission statement just hangs there having no discernible impact on working conditions and human relations. It does look good though.

The mission statement is often the product of the boss’ ideas on what the workplace should be and doesn’t reflect the collective mind of the workforce. I once worked for a director who invited us all to contribute to the new mission statement being produced. We all responded positively and each department worked on their own contribution with eagerness and enthusiasm. When the final document was produced and hung on the wall the general reaction was, “None of what we contributed was included.”

The final mission statement was obviously the product of senior management, expressed in the language of senior management. It was hung proudly on the wall as “OUR” mission statement. Even if this is your work reality you can still use the mission statement produced as the means by which you assert yourself. Challenge the leadership of your company, business or factory with the very values they have included in their mission statement. When something happens which doesn’t reflect the values of the mission statement draw the leader’s attention to it. You can reasonably presume that your leader would want to know when a cherished, well articulated value is being threatened. Can’t you? The mission statement is much more than a mere framed statement on the wall. Isn’t it what moves us and forms us and what challenges us?

Referring to the mission statement use phrases like these:

“In our continuing struggle to live in the spirit of our mission statement I feel that we should take a serious look at declining staff morale.”
“In the spirit of empowerment, defined in our mission statement, I would like to offer this suggestion for improvement.”

Whatever your concern is, always assert you opinion or suggestion cloaked in the values of their mission statement. Do this even if your company’s mission statement was the product of a collaborative effort.

Who can challenge your right to assert an opinion when your right to do so is written, framed and hanging on the wall for all to see?

Feeding your supervisor an article to read on the issue you feel strongly about, or asking that the article be the topic of discussion at a staff meeting is often an effective way to bring an issue to the floor.

If you are being evaluated by your supervisor and you disagree with some of his observations you must bring your feeling out in the open. You can do this by asking well posed questions such as... “What gives you the impression that I...” or “Do my fellow employees see it the way you do? “If the answer is “Yes, they do” then ask if you could have the names of one or two of them to discuss it further with them. By the supervisor’s response you will be able to discern whether he is telling the truth or not.

No matter how you choose to assert yourself with a “boss” you must be careful. These people are frequently easily threatened and insecure. They can also make your life at work miserable and block any opportunity for promotion. Sad, but true.
I believe that it is easier to assert yourself when your spirits are high and you feel good about being alive. When you’re down on life you can easily become down on yourself and when you’re down on yourself you are more likely to let people walk over you. To ensure that you don’t give up on your plan to be more assertive you must cultivate joy in your life. Here are a few ideas for your consideration.

**HOW TO CULTIVATE JOY IN YOUR LIFE**

1. For the next 24 hours, deliberately speak and think positive thoughts about people and events. If a negative thought enters your mind, visualize it leaving and replace it with a more positive one.

2. Look for the good in people. Challenge the bad.

3. Learn to be amused by the weaknesses of yourself and others. Don’t let those weaknesses upset or distract you.

4. Don’t take yourself, others, or life too seriously.

5. Remember that good health requires a healthy body and a healthy mind.

6. Health of body, mind and spirit is within your control.
7. Learn to laugh and let laughter heal your spirit. Laughter is the best medicine.

8. Love your work and enjoy it. Change your attitude toward your work and the people with whom you come in contact and joy will return to your life in abundance.

9. Love others as they are, not as you want them to be, and your world becomes a much more joyful place.

10. Love yourself enough not to allow anyone to destroy your self esteem or assault your dignity.

11. Treat others as you would like to be treated and expect the same from them.

12. Remember that worry and fear are destructive. They rob you of happiness and joy. Let go of worry and fear and trust in a power greater than you.

13. Count your blessings each day.

14. Live fully, laugh heartily, relax daily, love completely and enjoy the journey.

TO BE HAPPY...
You need someone to love
Something meaningful to do
Something to look forward to
Someone to laugh with.

A change in behaviour naturally follows a change in thinking.
1. Take three deep breaths slowly. It really works to relax the body and mind.

2. Relax the tongue. Usually the tongue is held tightly against the teeth. Free it up in the mouth so it can just rest there without tension.

3. Take one minute vacations. In your mind visit places where you find peace and stillness. Picture yourself there soaking up the beauty and solitude.

4. Relax your facial muscles. When we are tense we frown and squint which adds to the tension. Tell your facial muscles to relax and they will. Try to maintain this relaxed face throughout the day.

5. Move slowly. When you find yourself rushing for no reason, SLOW DOWN.


7. Listen to beautiful music. Mozart calms the restless spirit.

8. Watch and enjoy the sunset.
9. Visualize yourself as a balloon being inflated. As you breathe in, the balloon fills with your stress and tension. Then breathe out all the stress and tension leaving yourself limp and relaxed.

10. Enjoy the rhythm and beauty of nature for its lessons are patience and peace.

RELAX FOR EASY POWER
Cultivating a sense of humour allows you to overcome the toxic effects of difficult people.

Humour takes you from moping -to coping -to hoping.

1. The use of humour can do a great deal to improve the quality of your relationships at home, at work and at play.

2. Before you can use humour to solve individual tense situations, you have to cultivate an atmosphere where humour is enjoyed and shared frequently. You can’t tell a humourous story or make a humourous remark with the hope of neutralizing a tense situation if humour has never been a part of your relationship previously.

3. By looking at the faces of some people you could legitimately come to the conclusion that they haven’t laughed or even smiled for two hundred years. Introducing humour to your relationship with them will take time and effort, but will be worthwhile in the long run. Start slowly by having a cheery fun-loving disposition yourself. Laughter is contagious and just might be caught by the difficult people in your life.

4. If you don’t laugh as much as you used to you can change things by associating with humourous, fun-loving people and avoiding the difficult downers. It also helps to watch comedies on televi-
sion and at the movies. Collect cartoons and put them up on the fridge or the bulletin board.

5. Train yourself to look for the humour and fun in the things that happen to you each day. Learn to laugh at yourself. If you don’t laugh at yourself, you leave the job to others. This skill alone can do a lot to help you cope with toxic people.

6. Remember that a sense of humour is learned, not inherited.

7. Look for funny items that appear in the newspaper. I recall reading the want ads one night and discovered this gem: “The successful applicant should have 203 years experience.” Obviously the writer meant 2 or 3 years experience. I immediately cut it out and placed it in my file folder.

8. In my workshops on humour I usually ask the participants to share with one another the funniest thing that has ever happened to them. The laughter this generates is a joy to behold. Try this with your friends, colleagues and clients when the moment is right.

9. People will be more eager to share humour when you laugh heartily with them when they do. Really listen to and enjoy the humour of others.

CULTIVATE A CLIMATE OF HUMOUR AND WATCH GOOD THINGS HAPPEN.
Laughter isn’t just the best medicine; it’s also the best revenge.

Laughter has been called “social glue” for it bonds us to the people we laugh with.

Laughter helps us put the absurdities of life in perspective.

Live better... Laugh more
FOOD FOR THOUGHT...

“Treat others as if they were what they ought to be and you will help them become what they are capable of becoming.” Goethe

“No one needs love more than the person we find difficult to like.” Mike Moore

“Ignoring the giftedness of others is a form of psychological abuse.”

An organization is only as great as the people in it and the people are only as great as the organization encourages them to be.

What you believe is the foundation of your life.

An apology is a great way of having the last word.

Patience involves putting up with people you’d like to put down.

Putting other’s down is a dishonest way of praising yourself.
TEN TERRIFIC SELF-MOTIVATING TIPS TO FOSTER ASSERTIVENESS

No one can motivate anyone to do anything. All a person can do for another is provide them with incentives to motivate themselves. Here are ten very effective strategies to help you get up and get moving toward actualizing your enormous, untapped potential.

1. Be willing to leave your comfort zone. The greatest barrier to achieving your potential is your comfort zone. Great things happen when you make friends with your discomfort zone.

2. Don’t be afraid to make mistakes. Wisdom helps us avoid making mistakes and comes from making a million of them.


4. Choose to be happy. Happy people are easily motivated. Happiness is your birthright so don’t settle for anything else.

5. Spend at least one hour a day in self-development. Read good books or listen to inspiring tapes. Driving to and from work provides an excellent opportunity to listen to self-improvement CD’s.

6. Train yourself to finish what you start. So many of us become
scattered as we try to accomplish a task. Finish one task before you begin another.

7. Live fully in the present moment. When you live in the past or the future you aren’t able to make things happen in the present.

8. Commit yourself to joy. C.S. Lewis once said, “Joy is the serious business of heaven.”

9. Never quit when you experience a setback or frustration. Success could be just around the corner.

10. Dare to dream big dreams. If there is anything to the law of expectation then we are moving in the direction of our dreams, goals and expectations.

Charles Dubois once said,

“We must be prepared, at any moment, to sacrifice who we are for who we are capable of becoming.”
HOW TO ATTRACT WONDERFUL, AFFIRMING PEOPLE TO YOUR LIFE

Assertive people make great friends because they are confident in who they are and aren’t afraid to affirm the dignity of others. People aren’t threats, but supports and God knows we all need to be supported in our lives. It is important to point out here that friendship is a two way street. It has to involve mutual affirmation and encouragement. If, in your friendships, you are doing all the listening, all the giving and affirming then they aren’t genuine friendships. Once again, you must assert yourself and ask for what you want and need in the friendship.

THE ART OF BEING A FRIEND

✓ Be alert for any chance to praise another.

✓ Be fun to be with.

✓ Be genuinely concerned about what’s going on in the life of the other.

✓ Suspend your agenda in the interest of the other’s.

✓ Encourage and affirm your friend at every opportunity.

✓ Listen twice as much as you talk.
✓ Give genuine compliments frequently.

✓ Accept the person as they are and not as you want them to be.

✓ Ask questions and listen to their answers. There is a difference between prying and being interested.

✓ Be enthusiastic.

✓ Be a friend without conditions.

⚠️ EXPECT THE ABOVE TO BE APPLIED TO YOU AS WELL.
We are not here on earth to please others, but to become our best selves. Serving others is secondary to achieving our potential. We serve others most effectively when we are confident in who we are and in what we are capable of.

Putting others down is a dishonest way of praising ourselves. Telling a person off solves nothing. Telling someone honestly and openly how their behaviour impacts on you is the foundation of a good relationship based on justice and respect.

You choose the people you’re going to please.
In order to become skilled in the application of this material I suggest that you practise a lot. Stand in front of a mirror and pretend you are asserting yourself. Practise the looks, the questions and the statements until you become comfortable with them. When you’re ready, start putting them into practise. Start slowly and build gradually. Keep a journal and record your thoughts and feeling as you progress. Stay with it. Don’t give up and you will soon begin to notice a drastic change in how you relate to others.

Let me know how things are progressing. If you have any questions get in touch with me. If you have any suggestions to make regarding strategies that work for you let me know and I will include them in any updates I make to this book.

Thanks and GOOD LUCK

Mike Moore
MASTER THE ART OF VERBAL SELF DEFENSE!

THE LIGHTER SIDE
This company doesn't need an exercise program. We get enough exercise jumping to conclusions and pushing our weight around.
NO, NO. ALL THESE ARE MINE.
YOURS ARE ON THE DOORKNOB.

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YOUR CALL IS IMPORTANT TO US
SO PLEASE STAY ON THE LINE
SOMEONE WILL GET TO YOU EVENTUALLY.
Everything was going great until someone decided I liked needed rules.
Really, Harry, why don't you just go in and negotiate a raise like everyone else?
I think we have to work on your confidence, Wilson.
For years I lived thinking nobody knew I was alive then I farted in Walmart!
YRUL8?  To put it in language you're more familiar with.
To achieve success we must be driven by an urge which does not accept defeat.
TAKE LIFE LIKE A
DOG. IF YOU CAN'T
PLAY WITH IT OR
EAT IT THEN PEE
ON IT AND
CARRY ON.

Mike Meece
To succeed, judgement and timing are everything!
Burnout?
Doesn’t that imply that you were once on fire?
"IT'S REALLY NICE THAT YOU'VE BEEN CALLED BY GOD, NOAH, BUT THERE'S A HUGE MESS TO CLEAN AND THIS IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY ARK."
Getting into an argument with a teenager is like getting into a peeing contest with a skunk.

One stressed out parent

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A sure way to locate deadbeat dads!
WHY LIE?
I WANT A BEER
The meek shall inherit the earth... if that's ok with you.
I FEEL SO ASSERTIVE!
ENOUGH ABOUT ME TALKING ABOUT ME. HOW ABOUT YOU TALKING ABOUT ME FOR AWHILE.
OF COURSE I'M A PEOPLE PERSON YOU FOOL!
THIS IS GETTING OUT OF HAND. ALL HE DOES ALL DAY IS SIT AROUND SENDING SMOKE SIGNALS TO HIS FRIENDS.
TABLE FOR TWO
NEAR A WAITER
PLEASE
Happiness and peace of mind are inside jobs.
Mike Moore is a popular writer/cartoonist/motivational speaker whose work has appeared in newspapers and magazines throughout Canada and the United States. He has addressed teachers, nurses, business leaders, government employees and community organizations on a wide variety of topics related to motivation and human potential. All his presentations and seminars include healthy doses of humour, story and music.

For more information on Mike’s motivational books, CD's, manuals and special reports visit

http://www.motivationalplus.com
Mike Moore is a popular speaker, humorist and cartoonist whose work has appeared in newspapers and magazines throughout the United States and Canada. He is a recognized authority on the power of therapeutic humor in human wellness and relationships. His many speaking engagements throughout North America have convinced him that humor and laughter form a universal language that entertains, heals and unites.

Mike’s presentations, whether one hour or one day, are designed to inform, entertain, affirm and encourage audiences with a blend of relevant content, stories, humor and music. He engages his audience from the beginning and has them relaxed and laughing within minutes.

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